

and subjected the neighbouring barons to their rule, the Flemish cities were less successful in their political than in their mercantile ambitions. Their geographical situation at the mouth of the Rhine, and at the point of juncture of France, England, and Germany, made them indeed the emporium of Northern Europe, but rendered it difficult for them to gratify their desire for independence of the feudal system. No such barrier as the Alps, no such distance as that which divides Milan from Paris and Vienna, protected Ghent and Ypres from the great feudal powers. It was certain that, in the last resort, the Flemish Earl would invite the nobles of France to crush a league of his rebellious towns, before they could establish their sovereignty. This inevitable struggle was now brought to a rapid issue. Froissart has told the story with no less art, and with more science and insight, than he displays in the other parts of his work.

The affair began by a quarrel between the two chief cities. Bruges had won the favour of the Earl, who usually resided within its walls ; Ghent had incurred his jealousy by the wealth and pride of its citizens, so dangerous to his suzerainty in Flanders. Bruges was no less jealous of her great neighbour, for Ghent stood on the junction of the Lys and the Scheldt, along whose broad and famous streams the trade of half Europe was carried to its quays. Bruges possessed no such waterway, but it had always been the ambition of her citizens to divert the Lys from its present course and to turn it into the sea near Ostend for their own benefit. Their rivals had hitherto prevented them from carrying out this design, but the Earl now undertook the work on behalf of his favourite city. The canal, if made, would reverse the position. Ghent would be ruined, Bruges would step into its place. The digging was forcibly interrupted, and a war began between Ghent and other allied towns on one side, and Bruges with the Earl and nobility of Flanders on the other. It became a war of extermination between town and country, between the feudal and civic polities that had so long lived side by side with feelings of mutual hatred and rivalry. Two conditions were against the town—first, that many of their own number, such as